

SOME PROBLEMS OF THE LATER PALI LITERATURE<sup>1</sup>

Because of the records in the *Mahāvamsa* and elsewhere, the Pali writers of Ceylon, or in Ceylon, from Buddhaghosa onwards, can mostly be given fairly precise dates. Even so, there are a few authors whose dates are not established, such as Upatissa, who according to late tradition wrote the *Mahābodhivamsa*, and the anonymous author of the *Telakaṭṭhagāthā*. These two *kavis* are usually dated in the +10, on stylistic grounds and in the former case because there is a tradition that Upatissa wrote at the request of a Dāṭhānāga. But it is not at all certain that this Dāṭhānāga is the same person as one mentioned in the *Cūḷavamsa*. The Pali writers of Burma and elsewhere in South East Asia similarly are mostly given definite dates on the basis of the extant historical traditions of those countries.

In the case of Indian writers in Pali, however, the situation is entirely different, because Buddhism disappeared even from South India, presumably during the Turkish rule in Tamilnadu in the +14, and almost all its literature was destroyed, especially local chronicles of which no copies had been taken elsewhere. Only texts which had been taken to Ceylon, Burma and so on have been preserved from South Indian Buddhism. Only in rare cases can the date of an Indian Pali author be determined from his own statement in a colophon or introductory verse, through a reference to a datable person or event. For example, Kassapa, author of the *Mohavicchedanī*, can be dated thus on the basis of Coḷa history.

The most conspicuous problem here, and one which has given rise to a rather desultory controversy over the last hundred years, is that of Dhammapāla. Dhammapāla, or a Dhammapāla, ranks next to Buddhaghosa in Theravāda exegesis, in the quality and also the quantity of his output. Indeed, some would rate him superior to Buddhaghosa in scholarship and as a philosopher, on the ground that, whereas Buddhaghosa merely translated the old *Aṭṭhakathās* from Sinhalese into Pali, with, fortunately, a minimum of his own comment, Dhammapāla on the other hand seems to have written very original works, though based perhaps

on older notebooks or *Gaṇṭhipadas* and the tradition of his teachers. He also shows his mastery of various *sāstras* and of certain non-Theravāda schools of Buddhism.

In the early days of modern research on Pali, the suggestion was made that Dhammapāla was the same person as the Yogācāra author Dharmapāla. This now seems absurd, yet it has persisted in the secondary and tertiary sources on Pali literature and left the +7 as a widely accepted date for Dhammapāla (in fact Dharmapāla probably lived in the +6, but that does not concern us now).

Ignoring such guesswork, we are at the outset faced with the question whether there was one Dhammapāla or two. Some scholars seem to think that there were as many as three different Dhammapālas, responsible for the very extensive works preserved under that name. The *Gandhavamsa* has four, but at least one is a later Burmese author.

Following Buddhaghosa's commentaries, perhaps also following the Pali commentaries on the *Jātaka*, *Dhammapada*, *Niddesa*, *Paṭisambhidāmagga*, *Therāpadāna* and *Buddhavamsa*, a Dhammapāla wrote commentaries on the remaining books of the *Khuddakanikāya* (except apparently the *Therāpadāna*). He also wrote a commentary on the *Nettipakaraṇa*, which is regarded as canonical in Burma but not in Ceylon. Then a Dhammapāla wrote sub-commentaries on the *Visuddhimagga*, *Dīgha*, *Majjhima*, *Saṃyutta*, *Jātaka*, *Buddhavamsa* and *Nettipakaraṇa*. A certain Ānanda having written a sub-commentary on the entire *Abhidhamma*, a Dhammapāla wrote a sub-sub-commentary (*Anuṭṭkā*) on this. Finally a Dhammapāla wrote a manual of *Abhidhamma*, the *Saccasaṃkhepa*. Is this great corpus, more than thirty volumes, the work of one author, as some think? Or is the author of the *ṭīkā*s different from the Dhammapāla who sought to complete the *Aṭṭhakathā*? Is the author of the *Saccasaṃkhepa* different from both these? Rather uncertain tradition mentions a 'Culladhammapāla', presumably different from a hypothetical 'Mahādhammapāla' and indicating that two authors of the name were known. But some have suggested that 'Culladhammapāla' wrote only the *Saccasaṃkhepa* (as stated in the *Gandhavamsa*) and the other Dhammapāla everything else.

The colophons to Dhammapāla's *aṭṭhakathās* usually name the *vihāra* where he wrote, Badaratittha in Nāgapaṭṭana, but this

gives us no help in establishing the date (this *vihāra* is said to have been established by Dhammāsoka, thus in the -3). The *ṭṭkā* on the *Visuddhimagga*, on the other hand, states that the work was written at the request of a *thera* named Dāṭhānāga, of the Sittthagāma *vihāra*. But as in the case of Upatissa, mentioned above, there is nothing to establish that this Dāṭhānāga was the one named in the *Cūḷavaṃsa* as a contemporary of King Mahinda IV (+10). The manuscripts of the other sub-commentaries and of the *Saccasaṃkhepa* seem not to mention even the name of the author in their colophons and give us no help.

The *Sāsanavaṃsa*, a very late source, appears to distinguish two Dhammapālas, giving the commentaries in one list as by 'Dhammapāla' and the sub-commentaries in another as by 'Ācariya Dhammapāla'. It ascribes the *Saccasaṃkhepa* to 'Ānanda'. This last seems to be a mistake, but as the author of the *Saccasaṃkhepa* is designated 'pupil of Ānanda' (in the *Gandhavaṃsa*) the confusion might have arisen quite easily. It seems probable that the author of the *Anuṭṭkā* likewise was this pupil of Ānanda, the latter being the author of the *Mūlaṭṭkā*. Apart from the doubtful connection with Mahinda IV, the only limit on the date of Ānanda and this Dhammapāla seems to be, so far, the fact that Sāriputta and other authors of the +12 refer to the *Mūlaṭṭkā* and *Saccasaṃkhepa* (also to the *ṭṭkās* of Dhammapāla). The *Gandhavaṃsa*, a rather unreliable source, states that the author of the *Mūlaṭṭkā* was born in India and ascribes the commentaries and the sub-commentaries to the same Dhammapāla.

It would be possible to distinguish the author of the commentaries from the author of the sub-commentaries on grounds of style and especially of scholarship, of the works known to them (e.g. the author of the *ṭṭkās* knows the works of Bhartṭhari and Dīnnāga or Dharmakīrti), but this large research task has not yet been attempted, particularly as most of the *ṭṭkās* are so far available only in Burmese editions, which moreover are liable to inaccuracies where *sāstras* unfamiliar to their editors are concerned, as Dr. de Silva has shown. Two observations may be made bearing on this question, however.

Commentators in the Indian tradition plagiarise each other freely, often without acknowledgment. Usually their aim is the

quite modest one of codifying the doctrines handed down in their school, not writing anything original. In the present case there is a very striking example of such borrowing in that a long passage, about 40 pages, in the Commentary on the *Cariyāpiṭaka*, on the topic of the perfections of the *bodhisatta*, reappears in the Sub-commentary on the *Dīgha Nikāya*. This and some shorter passages common to the commentaries and sub-commentaries has been taken by Dr. de Silva (Introduction to her edition of the *Dīgha ṭṭkā*, p. xliii) as evidence for common authorship. But it is more likely that the *Ṭṭkā*kāra, finding Buddhaghosa deficient here, simply drew an authoritative statement from another commentary. Such identical passages in commentaries are not evidence either for the identity or for the difference of their authors, however, and no conclusion can be drawn from them. Also the knowledge of the methodology of the *Nettipakaraṇa* on the part of the *Ṭṭkā*kāra proves nothing in the case of such a learned interpreter, who moreover himself wrote a *ṭṭkā* on the *Nettipakaraṇa*. Dr. de Silva has further argued (pp. lii-lv) that Sāriputta in his *Vinaya Ṭṭkā*, stating that by 'Ācariya Dhammapāla' he everywhere refers to the author of the sub-commentaries on the *Suttanta* and then calling the commentator of the *Udāna*, *Cariyāpiṭaka*, etc., also 'Ācariya Dhammapāla', held that these were one author. However, this does not necessarily follow. When Sāriputta refers to the commentaries he always names them as well as their author, but where he refers to the sub-commentaries he sometimes names only the author and not the work, though at other times he names both. It would seem that his preliminary statement, probably added after writing the main text, is intended to explain who he means when he names 'Ācariya Dhammapāla' but not any work, otherwise there would be no point in making such a statement. This rather suggests that he knew there were two (or more) Dhammapālas and carefully distinguished between them.

Our second observation is that the *Netti Aṭṭhakathā* is ascribed in its colophon to the Dhammapāla of Badaratittha. Now there is a *Ṭṭkā* on this work, also ascribed to a Dhammapāla. Is it likely that a Theravādin commentator would first write a commentary and then proceed to write a sub-commentary on his own commentary? Most probably not, and this fact would

seem to confirm the distinction made in the *Sāsanavaṃsa* between the two Dhammapālas, the commentator and the sub-commentator.

The dates of these two Dhammapālas remain uncertain. The commentator some time after the early +5 aimed to complete the work of Buddhaghosa, but it is a matter of conjecture when such an aim was proposed. Had there been old Sinhalese commentaries on the works Dhammapāla commented on, the aim would have existed immediately after Buddhaghosa ceased work. But there is no evidence, it appears, that any old Sinhalese commentaries existed beyond those on the works covered by Buddhaghosa, and also on the *Jātaka* and *Dhammapada*. The other *Khuddaka* texts, being evidently late and apocryphal, were probably not covered by the ancient *Aṭṭhakathā*. In that case the idea of completing a cycle of *Aṭṭhakathās* on all the works of the *Suttanta Piṭaka* may have arisen only centuries later than Buddhaghosa. If the commentators on the *Niddesa* and *Paṭisambhidāmagga* lived in the +6, as generally supposed, that would seem to be the most likely date for Dhammapāla the commentator also.

For the sub-commentator we have so far only the +12 as limit and the very reasonable, but unconfirmed, proposal to date him in the +10. One would expect a fairly long interval between the period of composition of commentaries and that of sub-commentaries, but that of course gives us no definite date. It is quite likely that the *Anuṭṭkā* on the *Abhidhamma* and the *Saccasaṃkhepa* were written by the Ṭṭkākāra, but there seems to be no evidence to confirm this. The *Sāsanavaṃsa* states (de Silva p. xxxv) that Ānanda's *Mūlaṭṭkā* was the first (read *ādi*-) of all the *ṭṭkās* to be written. Thus, whatever his date, it appears likely that his pupil Dhammapāla continued his work by writing *ṭṭkās* on the *Visuddhimagga* and *Suttantapiṭaka* as well as by writing a sub-sub-commentary on Ānanda's *ṭṭkā*. Vajirabuddhi, whose date is unknown, is likely to have written his *Vinaya Ṭṭkā* immediately afterwards. Incidentally the fact that the author of the *Saccasaṃkhepa* has been called 'Culla' Dhammapāla does not imply that he wrote fewer works than the earlier Dhammapāla, any more than the title *Cūḷavaṃsa* implies a shorter work than the *Mahāvaṃsa*. In such cases it seems to have

been the convention to call a later teacher 'culla' or 'cūḷa', probably implying greater respect for a more ancient teacher, regardless of his output.

There is one further possible indication limiting the date of the Ṭṭkākāra Dhammapāla. According to Dr. Saddhātissa (*Upāsakajanālaṅkāra* Introduction, p. 51), the anonymous *Paṭipattisaṅgha* refers to the *Saddhammanettiṭṭkā*. Although Saddhātissa appears to think this may be a reference to some earlier work, it seems likely that the sub-commentary on the *Nettipparakaraṇa* in question is in fact Dhammapāla's. Tradition, as we have seen above, knows of no *ṭṭkās* earlier than those of Ānanda and Dhammapāla. Now according to Saddhātissa this *Paṭipattisaṅgha* was written at the suggestion of Yuvarāja Kassapa, who probably was King Kassapa V of Ceylon (+914 to 923). If that is correct, and if the *Paṭipattisaṅgha* refers to Dhammapāla's *ṭṭkā*, then Dhammapāla must have written not later than the beginning of the +10 and could have had no connection with King Mahinda IV of Ceylon. The +9 therefore becomes the most likely period for Ānanda and Dhammapāla, the earliest authors of *ṭṭkās*, and probably for Vajirabuddhi also. The +8 also is possible, but would rather prolong the interval before the renewed composition of *ṭṭkās* by Sāriputta and others.

Turning from these sub-commentaries to the strictly literary or *kāvya* works in Pali in this period, we again find chronological difficulties, as mentioned above. Apart from the *Mahāvaṃsa*, which lies only on the borderline of *kāvya* from the stylistic point of view as well as that of aesthetics, the earliest Pali *kāvyas* of the medieval period appear to be the prose *Mahābodhivaṃsa* and the verse *Telakaṭāhagāthā*. Upatissa's *kāvya* in stylish prose, though it sometimes embodies matter from commentaries with only a minimum of assimilation, may be classified as a biography or *ākhyāyikā*, having the Bodhi Tree as its heroine. She is figuratively united with the Buddha at the time of his Enlightenment and then her offspring is brought to Ceylon to establish the doctrine there, a living presence of Enlightenment. The anonymous poem of approximately a hundred verses is a kind of lyric, a *śataka*, presenting Buddhist philosophy in poetic form in the *vasantatilaka* metre as a meditation on dying, impermanence, conditioned origination and related themes. The dates of

both *kāvya*s are uncertain, the *śataka* being ascribed to a legendary monk of ancient times, but there is a consensus of impressions in favour of the +9 or +10 for both. Without offering anything new on the precise dates, it may be useful to speak of stylistic matters to confirm the approximate period and also to dissipate certain misconceptions about this movement to create new *kāvya*s in Pali so long after the earliest *kāvya* literature known to us, which happens also to be in Pali.

Scholars have often spoken, with something like scorn, of 'Sanskritised' Pali in works like these, as if their style of composition is not really legitimate or natural. Vocabulary is of course a prominent feature of style and innovations in it are commonly found in the greatest authors of the world's literature. No doubt some of these Pali authors read Sanskrit *kāvya*s by Bāṇa and others, but it should be recognized that *kāvya* was far from being merely a department of Sanskrit composition. Just as the earliest *kāvya* now available happens to be in Pali, so from that early period onwards Prakrit languages were always used in *kāvya*, no doubt far more extensively than the few works preserved would superficially seem to suggest. Thus we may mention the *Brhatkathā*, *Saptaśatī*, *Setubandha* and so on, not to speak of dramas in a mixture of languages, and then the numerous Jaina *kāvya*s in Māhārāṣṭrī and Apabhraṃśa, especially from the +8 to the +10. It would be more correct to speak of the specifically *kāvya* vocabulary, the poetic vocabulary, cultivated in all these works, than of 'Sanskrit' vocabulary, though of course Sanskrit *kāvya* shared the common heritage of poetic vocabulary. Thus it is unjustifiable to object to such words as *soma*, 'the Moon' (*Telakaṭāhagāthā* verse 43), as artificial because apparently not found in the earlier Pali literature extant.

Another aspect of this prejudice among scholars is that, according to the editors of the PED, they omitted from their dictionary 900 words (including *soma*) given in Childer's Dictionary on the authority of Moggallāna ("Afterword" p. 734) but according to the editors not found in Pali literature and therefore merely borrowed from the Sanskrit lexicon of Amara-siṃha. It is very strange that a considerable number of these words is found in the *Telakaṭāhagāthā* and *Mahābodhivaṃsa* (e.g. *kanti*, 'beauty' or 'grace'; *sikara*, 'spray'; *āsāra*, 'shower';

all on p. 2 of the latter), both works which were published by the Pali Text Society itself three or four decades before the Dictionary and which should have been covered by it. That they were ignored shows a prejudice against them as in some way not proper Pali. Moggallāna and following him Childers have thus been condemned unjustly as giving words which were not Pali, though in fact they are found in standard Pali authors.

Another aspect of style with which late Pali *kavis* have been unjustly reproached is the use of long compounds and long sentences. The early Prakrit inscriptions of the Sātavāhana period show that these were current features of Prakrit before we have them actually attested in Sanskrit, therefore they might be regarded as features of Prakrit later imitated in Sanskrit, rather than the reverse, but of course with such limited materials available no conclusion can be established. Moreover in the *Kuṇḍala Jātaka* we find very long compounds even in ancient Pali of about the -2, as well as long sentences. Thus these criticisms of medieval Pali *kavis* are of the same kind as the all too numerous hasty, superficial and prejudiced remarks made about *kāvya* literature in Sanskrit and other languages by the scholars of about three quarters of a century ago. They were good philologists, but as far as literature, and also philosophy, were concerned they were mostly superficial, narrow-minded and uneducated. What all these scholars missed was the subtler differences and developments of style, which for example differentiate Śūra and Bāṇa from the early Prakrit inscriptions and from each other. It is by observing these finer features of sentence construction, of vocabulary, of figures of speech and also of the aesthetic organisation of longer literary works that we can really distinguish stylistic movements and periods in *kāvya* and thus suggest approximate dates for works whose precise dates are not recorded.

The lesson for us in all this is humility, the quality which the scholars of a century ago and their pupils, with rare exceptions, so blatantly lacked. Though we know so much more than they did, because we have access to such a greater range of Indian literature and especially literary criticism in the Indian tradition, we must practice humility, because that is the only way to learn easily and to discover the truth.

The *Anāgatavaṃsa* or *Anāgatabuddhavaṃsa* is traditionally

ascribed (in the *Gandhavaṃsa*) to Kassapa, author of the *Mohavicchedanī*, mentioned above. Here we have a different kind of problem, namely the authenticity of a text, particularly one which seems to be badly preserved (see Minayeff's edition in the JPTS, 1886). The text is not philosophical and hardly literary, but purports to be historical, if such a term can be applied to the future. Minayeff edited the text from two manuscripts of Burmese origin, which he calls A and B. A apparently formed the main basis of the edition and is in verse, B is mixed with prose, which Minayeff is inclined to regard as commentary and does not edit. He also had a commentary by an Upatissa of Ceylon, in a fragmentary manuscript (C), also Burmese, and gives some extracts from it. Finally he had a manuscript which he calls D of a quite different text on the same topic, which he does not edit but of which he gives an extract. He notes that there is another manuscript of this D text in Paris, in Cambodian script. It has separate chapters on each of ten future Buddhas. In fact this text is the *Dasabodhisattuppattikathā* edited by Saddhātissa, PTS 1975, from Sinhalese manuscripts.

Returning to manuscript A, we find from Minayeff that it has a colophon, which he prints separately from the text since it is not found in manuscript B, which mentions a dynasty of King Rājārāja though not the name of the author. Now Kassapa in his *Mohavicchedanī* (p. 359) names a dynasty of Rājādhirāja, thus it appears that the *Anāgatavaṃsa* colophon refers to the same Coḷa patronage. Rājādhirāja might be merely a metrical variation, but we have Rājārāja I in +985 to 1014, Rājādhirāja I in +1044 to 1052, etc., both names being popular in the Coḷa family. This evidence, though rather tenuous, supports the statement in the *Gandhavaṃsa* about Kassapa's authorship of both texts. There is another piece of evidence, still more tenuous but also agreeing with Kassapa's authorship of both texts. According to the *Anāgatavaṃsa*, Buddhism must disappear before the future Buddha Metteyya restores the Doctrine. The prose text in B gives a detailed account of this (pp. 34–6). A similar detailed account (based on Mp I 87–90) is found in the *Mohavicchedanī* (p. 202), concerning the gradual disappearance of the Pali texts. This elaboration seems not strictly necessary for the subject matter of this *Abhidhamma* manual, but suggests that

Kassapa had a particular interest in this question of the disappearance of Buddhism. Until further evidence comes to light, we may tentatively accept Kassapa's authorship of the *Anāgatavaṃsa*. Its date thus falls at the end of the +12 (see *Mohavicchedanī* Preface p. xvii) and it was written in the Coḷa Empire of Tamilnadu.

The *Anāgatavaṃsa* as edited by Minayeff briefly describes the Bodhisatta Ajita, a contemporary of the Buddha Gotama, and then gives a more detailed account of his future life as the Buddha Metteyya. A verse at the end of manuscript B gives the names of ten *bodhisattas* who will be future *buddhas*, apparently the same as the ten *buddhas* named and described in the *Dasabodhisattuppattikathā*, though there seem to be some corruptions and alternative names in the text. In manuscript B the text appears to be a *sutta*. It is supposed to have been spoken by the Buddha after the *Buddhavaṃsa*. Of course, the tradition about the future is supposed to be based on matters revealed by the Buddha Gotama. Manuscript B seems to deny Kassapa's authorship, in order to make the text a *sutta*, but of course we cannot accept that. Kassapa used various sources in tradition, in the Canon and commentaries and perhaps others not known to us (cf. the texts on the *anāgata* preserved in Tibetan), and put together a short narrative on the Buddha Metteyya. Presumably some later author elaborated the traditions about nine more future *buddhas* in the *Dasabodhisattuppattikathā*. We need a new edition of Kassapa's work, preferably based on more manuscripts and including the whole of the prose text and also Upatissa's commentary.

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### Note

- 1 Lecture given at the Meeting of the Society for Pali and Buddhism in Nagoya on May 23rd 1980. Thanks are due to Mr. G. Schopen of the Reiyyukai Library, Tokyo, for drawing attention to the publication of the *Dasabodhisattuppattikathā* by the PTS and to two short Tibetan texts on the *anāgata*. '+' and '-' are used for 'A.D.' and 'B.C.' or the 'Western Era'.